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No. 423

# A MAN AND HIS WIFE

*A Farce in One Act  
from the Japanese*

BY

COLIN CAMPBELL CLEMENTS

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Publisher  
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# A Man and His Wife

*A FARCE IN ONCE ACT*

*FROM THE JAPANESE*

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no 1

# A MAN AND HIS WIFE

## PERSONS

mitsune

His Wife

Tarankuwazhiya, *his servant.*

(mitsune *enters through the audience, talking as he walks toward the stage.*)

mitsune. I am a resident in the suburbs of the metropolis. On the occasion of a recent journey to the city I was served at a tea house by a girl called Hana. I became very much attached to her . . . oh, very much so. And now to-night I am to meet her again. But my vixen of a wife has got scent of the affair, and thus made it difficult for me to go. Ah, I'll call her and tell her some pretty fable that may set me free.

(*The curtain rises on the simple interior of a Japanese house. mitsune mounts the stage and goes to a door at the back.*)

mitsune. Halloo! Halloo! Are you there . . . are you there?

Wife. You are pleased to call me? What is it you want?

mitsune. Well, please come in.

Wife. Your commands are obeyed.



MITSUNE. My reason for calling you is simply this: (*He pauses a moment in thought, scratching the back of his head.*) I want to tell you how much my spirits have been affected lately by continual dreams . . . that's why I called you.

WIFE. You're talking rubbish! Dreams come from stomach trouble . . . and do not come true. (*With an ironical laugh.*) Don't bother your head about them.

MITSUNE. What you say is quite correct . . . as usual. Dreams do not come true nine times out of ten. Still, mine have affected my spirits to such an extent that I think of making some pilgrimage or other to offer up prayers both for you and for myself.

WIFE. Where will you go?

MITSUNE. I mean to worship at every Shintau shrine and every Buddhist temple throughout the land.

WIFE. No . . . no! I won't allow you to go out of the house for a single hour.

MITSUNE. But——

WIFE. If you are so completely bent upon it, choose some devotion that can be performed at home.

MITSUNE. Some devotion to be performed at home? What devotion could it be?

WIFE. Why . . . burning incense on your arm or——

MITSUNE. How thoughtlessly you talk! Such a devotion would not suit me . . . a layman if ever there was one.

WIFE. I won't tolerate any devotion that cannot be performed at home.

MITSUNE. Well, I never . . . you are one for talking at random. Hang it. What devotion shall it be? (*He reflects a few moments.*) Ah! I have

it! I will perform the devotion of abstraction.

WIFE. Abstraction? What is it?

ITSUNE. You do not know? (*Obviously making up the tale as he talks.*) It is . . . it is a devotion which was practised in the days of old Saint Daruma. Blessings on him! You see you put your head under what is called the "abstraction blanket" and obtain salvation by forgetting all things past and to come . . . a most difficult form of devotion.

WIFE. About how long does it take?

ITSUNE. Well . . . I should say about a week . . . or two weeks.

WIFE. That's too long.

ITSUNE. Then for how long would my own darling consent to it without complaining?

WIFE. About one hour is what I should suggest . . . but, if you can do it in a day, you are welcome to try.

ITSUNE. Please . . . won't you grant me at least a day and a night?

WIFE. A day and a night?

ITSUNE. Yes.

WIFE. I don't like the idea, but if you are so completely bent on it, take a day and a night for your devotion.

ITSUNE. Really and truly?

WIFE. Yes, really and truly.

ITSUNE. Oh! But I have something to tell you: if a woman so much as peep through a chink, to say nothing of her coming into the room where the devotee is sitting, the spell of the devotion is instantly broken. So be sure . . . very sure, not to come where I am.

WIFE. I will not come near you. So perform away.

ITSUNE. Then we shall meet again after I have accomplished my task.

WIFE. Yes . . . yes.

mitsune. Good-bye.

WIFE. You seem very anxious to hurry me off.

mitsune. (*Pushing her toward the door*) Oh, no . . . no, not at all . . . good-bye . . . good-bye.

WIFE. Good-bye.

mitsune. As I said before, mind you don't come to me. We have the Buddhist's warning words: "When there is a row in the kitchen, to be rapt in abstraction is an impossibility."

WIFE. I don't remember them.

mitsune. Oh, yes, yes . . . So whatever happens, don't come near me.

WIFE. I shall not think of intruding.

mitsune. Well, then, we shall meet again when the devotion is over.

WIFE. Eh? Oh, yes . . . yes.

mitsune. Good-bye . . . good-bye.

WIFE. Funny, I've never seen you hurry before . . . and so determined. Good-bye. (*She goes out.*)

mitsune. (*Rubbing his hands together and chuckling to himself*) What fools women are . . . some of them! She believed me! (*He calls.*) Tarankuwazhiya, are you there?

SERVANT. Yes, sir.

mitsune. Come in here.

SERVANT. At your service.

mitsune. Oh, you've been quick in coming.

SERVANT. My master seems to be in good spirits.

mitsune. For my good spirits there is a good reason. You see I have an engagement with my beloved Hana this evening. But somehow my old woman got scent of the affair so I told her I was going to perform the religious devotion of abstraction for a whole day and night. Clever, eh? For carrying out my plan of going to see Hana?



SERVANT. Yes . . . yes, sir.

mitsune. But you must do me a good turn.

SERVANT. What may it be?

mitsune. Simply this: I told my old woman not to intrude on my devotions, but, being the old vixen she is, she may peep in. Oh, what a noise she would make if she ever learned the truth! So . . . I want you to take my place until I return.

SERVANT. But . . .

mitsune. But what?

SERVANT. Well, you see . . .

mitsune. What is it?

SERVANT. I would rather you would excuse me.

mitsune. Nonsense! Am I not master in my own house . . . that is, when my wife is not present?

SERVANT. But I would rather be excused.

mitsune. No, no! You must do this for me.

SERVANT. Please . . . please let me off.

mitsune. You heed what my wife says, and won't heed what I say myself! Stand up there! Do you mean that you have made up your mind to brave me? (*Threatening to beat the servant.*)

SERVANT. Oh! I will obey!

mitsune. Then you will take my place here?

SERVANT. Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . yes . . .

mitsune. Be quiet till I get things set right for you to sit in abstraction. Here, sit down.

SERVANT. (*Sitting on the floor*) Your commands are laid to heart.

mitsune. (*Laughing to himself*) It's going to be a little uncomfortable. (*He throws the blanket over the SERVANT's head.*) This is the "abstraction blanket." Now if my old woman should come into the room don't . . . don't remove the blanket.

SERVANT. Not if I know what's good for me . . . um . . . I'm not ready to die yet, master.

mitsune. Then be careful. (*The head under*

*the blanket nods vigorously.)* I will be back soon.

SERVANT. Please be good enough to return quickly.

MITSUNE. Yes . . . yes. (*He goes toward the window at the left.*) Well, that's over. No doubt Hana is waiting impatiently for me. (*He goes out. MITSUNE'S wife appears at the back.*)

WIFE. (*Half aloud*) Why, it's much more uncomfortable than I had supposed. (*She comes forward.*) Please . . . please . . . you told me not to come to you and I had intended not to do so but I felt anxious. Won't you lift that blanket and take something? (*There is no answer.*) Just a little cup of tea? (*The figure under the blanket shakes its head.*) The thought of my being so disobedient and coming to you after the care you took to tell me not to intrude may justly rouse your anger. Forgive me. (*Pause.*) Forgive my rudeness. (*The figure shakes his head.*) You do forgive me! Then take that blanket off and repose yourself . . . even for a minute. (*The figure shakes its head again.*) You may say "no" again and again, but I *will* have it off. You *must* take it off. Do you hear? (*She pulls off the blanket.*) What! You! You rascal! Where has my old man gone? Speak! Speak!

SERVANT. I . . . I know nothing.

WIFE. Speak! Where has he gone? To that woman's house? Speak . . . or I'll . . . I'll tear you to pieces. (*She flies at him.*)

SERVANT. Yes . . . yes . . . master went to see Miss Hana.

WIFE. Miss Hana, do you say! Say *Minx* . . . say *minx*!

SERVANT. Yes . . . yes . . . yes!

WIFE. How came you to be sitting here?

SERVANT. It was my master's orders.

WIFE. So! I'll fix him. I want you to arrange this blanket on top of me just as it was arranged on you.

SERVANT. I . . . I would rather ask you to excuse me.

WIFE. I will not.

SERVANT. Please . . . please let me out of this.

WIFE. No, no! You must arrange the blanket. I promise you my husband shall not so much as point a finger at you. *I am master in this house.* Do you hear me?

SERVANT. Yes . . . yes.

WIFE. Then obey me.

SERVANT. (*Picking up the blanket*) I fear it will be uncomfortable, but I must ask you to put your head under this.

WIFE. Arrange me so that he will think it is still you.

SERVANT. He will never know. It will do very nicely like this.

WIFE. Will it?

SERVANT. (*Covering her head, he makes a motion as if to kick her*) Yes . . . yes.

WIFE. (*Her head from under the blanket*) Well, then . . . go and rest. (*Her head pops in again.*)

SERVANT. (*Again about to kick her*) Your commands are laid to heart.

WIFE. (*Again her head appears*) Wait a moment.

SERVANT. Yes, ma'am.

WIFE. It is scarcely necessary to say that you are not to tell my husband I am here.

SERVANT. I should not think of it. (*He moves away.*)

WIFE. I understand you have been wishing for a purse and silk kimona. I will give you one of each which I have worked with my own hands.



SERVANT. I shall be grateful for your kindness.

WIFE. Now be off to bed . . . put out the light.

SERVANT. Yes, ma'am.

(TARANKAUWAZHIYA puts out the small stand lantern and softly closes the door at the back after him. After a pause—punctuated by loud snores from under the blanket—MITSUNE is heard singing:)

Why should the lonely sleeper heed  
The midnight bell, the bird at dawn?  
But oh! They're sorrowful indeed  
When loosened was the damask zone.

Her image still, with locks that sleep  
Had tangled, haunts me, and for aye;  
Like willow sprays where soft winds  
sweep  
All tangled, too, my feelings lie.

(He appears at the window. In a loud whisper, walking back and forth and rubbing his hands together joyously.)

MITSUNE. Halloo! Halloo! Tarankauwazhiya! I'm back! I'm back! I'm just back. (*The figure under the blanket starts up suddenly. MITSUNE enters the room.*) Poor fellow! the time must have seemed long to you. I'll tell you what Hana said to me last night if you care to listen . . . do you? (*The figure nods acquiescence. MITSUNE sits.*) Well, then, I'll tell you all about it. I made all the haste I could. As I hurried along I thought of how anxiously Hana must be waiting for me in her loneliness, saying to herself, perhaps, with the Chinese poet:



"He promised, but he comes not, and I lie on my pillow in the fifth watch of the night:  
The wind shakes the pine trees and bamboos; can it be my beloved?"

Then as I was about to ask admittance I heard the dear girl softly singing:

"The breezes through the pine trees moan,  
The dying torch burns low;  
Ah me, 'tis eerie all alone!  
Say, will he come or no?"

I gently rapped on the door. Hana called, "Who's there? Who's there?" A shower was falling so I answered, singing:

"Who comes to see you, Hana dear,  
Regardless of the falling rain?  
And do your words, 'Who's there, who's there?'  
Mean that you wait for lovers twain?"

To which she replied laughingly:

"What a fine joke! Well, who can tell  
On such a dark and rainy night  
Who ventures out must love me well,  
And I, of course, must be polite,  
And say: Pray, sir, pass this way!"

And with these words, she loosed the ring and staple with a cling-a-ling, and pushed open the door with a crick-tick; and while the breeze from the bamboo blind poured toward me laden with the scent of flowers, Hana, clasping light my hand, drew me in. Ah, you can guess the rest, my boy.

*(With a deep sigh and a shake of his head MITSUNE rises.)*

Too soon the time of parting came. Hana whispered softly in my ear:

“Methought that when I met thee, dearest heart!  
I’d tell thee all that swells within my breast;  
But now already ’tis the hour to part  
And oh! how much still lingers unexpressed.”

But for all her entreaties, and for all my own regrets, I remembered that “meeting is but parting” and

Tearing me loose, I made to go; farewell!  
Farewell a thousand times, like ocean sands  
Untold! And followed by her distant gaze  
I went; but as I turned me round, the moon,  
A slender rim, sparkling remained behind,  
And oh, what pain it was for me to part!  
So here I am back to my old vixen of a wife.

WIFE. You wretch! You wretch!

*(The blanket is thrown off and MITSUNE’S wife rushes after him, around the room and out the door calling as the curtain falls.)*

END

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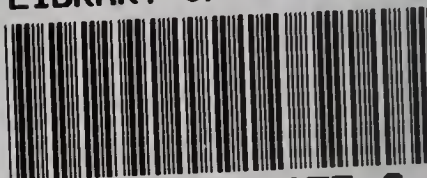
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